# 'Futurist' looks into Racine County trends

BY MICHAEL BURKE
Journal Times

Jim Carroll is a consultant and "futurist" who researches trends in society and many different industries. His latest book is, "What I Learned From Frogs in Texas: Saving Your Skin With Forward-Thinking Innovation."

Carroll will be the keynote speaker for Wednesday's Racine County Economic Development Corp. annual meeting at the Racine Marriott. He spoke by telephone from his home in Mississauga, Ontario about some trends he sees and what they mean for Racine County.

**What is a futurist? What sort of credentials or expertise does it require?**

I do a huge amount of research. But also, when you've been at this for 12 years, you develop sort of a finely tuned radar. So it's both research and experience.

"I'm a professional accountant by background. It gives me a business background.

I've been out talking for about 12 years to a bunch of blue-chip clients," including Disney and DaimlerChrysler.

**How far out in time do you make projections?**

I look 5 years to 15 or 20 years in broad-trend perspective.

I was recently asked to talk about health care in 60 years. I don't think I have a clue. The future is catching up to us quicker than ever before. I am finding that thing's I'm thinking about suddenly become an issue faster than ever before.

For example, about four or five years ago, I was saying I think we will see the end of retirement. People have a longer life expectancy, they'll be getting bored, the work place will need them, and there will be pension challenges; people will need the money.

In the last six months, a good chunk of the business world has been starting to clue into that in a very broad way.

**What's the most important thing happening or coming that you think people are least aware of?**

The most obvious, and the one people spend absolutely no time thinking about, is the disappearance of change-resistance. What I mean by that is, a lot of baby boomers have never been really good dealing with the change occurring in the work place, new industrial models, all the ways the world is changing around them. They have really had to struggle.

Members of generations X and Y, they're just completely open to any type of change. As they get more involved in government positions, business executive positions, economic development opportunities, they will be far more aggressive in their desire and willingness to do things differently. I think there is just a huge pent-up energy in 30- to 45-year-olds, and even younger."

One result will be a boom in telecommuting, or working from home. A lot companies have tried to do that, but they pay lip service. The attitude of a lot of baby boomers is, 'If you're not in the office, if I don't see you doing it, you're not really doing it.'

I think next generation will look at it and say, 'Let's just do it.'

**You said you will talk here about skills shortage and specialization. What is the trend there?**

Medical knowledge, for example, is doubling every eight years. There is no way anyone can keep up with everything. Every single career is fragmenting into specialties.

The simple law of supply and demand says that as something becomes more scarce, it becomes more expensive. That also means you could have a very specialized skill and be located anywhere on Earth and work in it.

That will afford people the chance to live where they want and do the kind of work they want to do.

**Talk about opportunities in this time of China's emergence.**

The key part of my message is: Everybody focusing on China, outsourcing, and those sorts of things.

I think lots of folks are dispirited by the rapid emergence of China on the global economy and the downside that shows (offshoring of jobs etc). But in the context of rapid change/knowledge growth, there is still a lot of opportunity for American communities to play off their strengths.

In manufacturing, it all comes down to rapid evolution of knowledge. New discoveries are being made faster than ever before. Things are happening faster, but you also can be more flexible, change the line faster, respond to rapidly changing consumer desires. Local manufacturers need to understand how fast things change, and how to make sure people are properly skilled.

People have to stay focused on where opportunities are coming from — rather than sitting around thinking about 'China, oh my ... things are bleak.' They have to have the mindset to be able to change quicker.

In my latest book I talk about people with very specialized skills that I call 'complexity managers.' That is, people whose entire focus is managing that increasing complexity. I think it's coming.

## If You Go

**What:** Racine County Economic Development Corp. annual meeting.
**When:** Wednesday, May 31; Program at 4:30 p.m., reception at 5:30 p.m.
**Where:** Racine Marriott, 7111 Washington Ave.
**How to register:** Call RCEDC at (262) 898-7410, or e-mail *rcedc@racinecountyedc.org*